

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

*Media Office
Democratic Caucus
John Schorg, Director
Statehouse, Room 157
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621
Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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HOUSE PASSES WELCH BILLS ON MEDICAID DOCTORS, SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

INDIANAPOLIS -- State Rep. Peggy Welch (D-Bloomington) has played a key role in passage of bills that will encourage doctors to treat more Medicaid patients and provide assistance to victims of sexual assault.

Welch authored an amendment to Senate Bill 459 that would create an annual \$500 tax credit for doctors who serve 500 or more Medicaid patients per year.

"We haven't increased the reimbursement to doctors who treat Medicaid patients since the late 1980s," said Welch. "Here is an opportunity to show how much we appreciate their work."

According to Welch, there are 2,853 doctors in Indiana who care for Medicaid patients. However, only 273 of these doctors care for over 500 Medicaid patients yearly. The tax credit is expected to cost only \$137,000 per year.

"These are doctors who provide care to children, the disabled and low-income families," said Welch. "Some doctors serve more of these patients than others, and we should thank them for their work. This might also urge doctors to treat more Medicaid patients."

Senate Bill 459 provides a credit for employers who offer health care plans to their employees. In addition, it contains provisions that will provide tax deductions for people paying off student loans or saving for college. This legislation also makes smoking on public mass transportation or near a public transportation terminal a Class B infraction.

Senate Bill 472, which Welch co-sponsored, will increase the amount of time victims of sexual assault have to report the crime to qualify for reimbursement for medical emergency services.

Under present law, a victim of sexual assault who is 18 or older must report the crime within 48 hours. Senate Bill 472 will increase the amount of time to 96 hours.

"This legislation will affect how medical services are offered to sex crime victims and how the health care provider who carries out the forensic exams is reimbursed," said Welch. "Positive changes are made by this bill that will make things easier for both the victim and the health care provider."

The bill specifies that anyone under the age of 18 who has been sexually assaulted must report to Child Protective Services or a law enforcement officer to qualify for reimbursement. However, the victim does not have to report the crime within a certain amount of time.

"At such a terrible, tragic time, we should do what we can to care for the victim," said Welch. "This is a very simple way for the state to help."

Senate Bill 472 will require the Victim Services Division of the Criminal Justice Institute to process applications for reimbursement for emergency medical services to a sex crime victim within 120 days.

The fund for reimbursing the medical costs of victims of sexual assault is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, a percentage of court fees collected around the state, work release money, restitution and trust funds.

The fund assists victims of sexual assault and their families with medical expenses, funeral expenses, lost wages, psychological counseling and the collection of evidence.

The most recent available statistics show Indiana pays out about \$3 million in reimbursement fees per year to sexual assault victims. The average reimbursement is between \$1,500 and \$2,500. Over 2,100 victims per year receive reimbursement for emergency medical services.

Both Senate Bill 459 and 472 now return to the Senate for further consideration.